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Atari Online News, Etc.
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->From the Editor's Keyboard "Saying it like it is!"
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It's really late here at A-ONE HQ this week. With the week before the holidays being typically very busy at work, my work schedule was drastically changed, and I ended up working late tonight. So, a late work schedule means this week's issue is also late. It's been a long week; and I've just finished up working six straight days. It wasn't fun, but it's now over and I have a couple of days off to get some much-needed rest!

Hopefully everyone is all set for the holidays without the dreaded need to go out and get those last-minute gifts. It rarely fails that we need to go out and buy a gift or two that we neglected to pick up earlier. But this year we managed to get everything done with a few days to spare! And I'm going to enjoy the opportunity to be able to relax this weekend for a change. I hope that you get to do the same!

Last year at about this time I mentioned in one of my editorials that I would be considering putting A-ONE to bed for the last time some time this year. The thought has been getting a lot of thought throughout the year; and there have been numerous times that I was seriously close to doing so. Obviously I haven't done that yet, but I'm spending more and more time thinking about it. For one thing, time has been tough to find to work on a weekly publication. News items that I feel would be interesting for our readers is not as abundant as past years. More and more focus has been placed on "mobile" computing rather than computing as we know it, or knew it. And Atari news - well, we know how that's been for many years now! But, we've grown towards computing and internet news to take up the slack, but non-traditional computing interests have been taking over; and I don't feel that this particular direction is one that I want to move towards. That's why you don't see stories about the new phone technology stories mentioned, "apps", and other mobile stuff. And I don't see it happening.

But another important factor is that we've been doing A-ONE for 13 years now. That's a long time! A-ONE started off as an idea between Joe and I, way back when. It's always been something that we shared doing. But, things change. Joe has been having his own set of medical issues; and that's why you haven't seen his words of wisdom among these pages for a number of months now. We're a team, and if that team cannot continue, it may be time to "retire". It's going to be something that we'll have to discuss over the next few weeks. We started this project together, and when the time comes, we'll end it together.

Meanwhile, all of us here at A-ONE want to wish all of our readers a very happy holiday season. Please celebrate the holidays responsibly so that we all can ring in the new year together!

Until next time...

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->In This Week's Gaming Section - PlayStation Vita Has Bumpy Debut!
Sony Sued Over An Attempt To Keep Its Customers from Suing
Video Games Won't Make You Smarter!

->A-ONE's Game Console Industry News - The Latest Gaming News!

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PlayStation Vita Has Bumpy Debut in Japan

Sony's new PlayStation Vita handheld gaming device sold more than a quarter-million units in its worldwide debut in Japan this weekend. But that failed to match the initial push by its rival Nintendo 3DS device earlier this year, and the Vita's release was partially marred by user complaints and error reports.

Thousands of eager consumers reportedly lined up to get first crack at buying the device on Saturday. Reuters reported on Tuesday that some 321,000 units were sold within two days. The relatively similar 3DS, meanwhile, sold more than 371,000 units in its Japanese debut this February.

The BBC also reported on Tuesday that Sony released an apology on its Japanese PlayStation site, as well as a software upgrade, following a series of complaints from users about problems including frozen displays, unresponsive touch screens and system crashes.

The Vita and 3DS are trying to carve out a niche for handheld devices dedicated solely to gaming as smart phones and tablets have greatly increased their own gaming capabilities in recent years. After its strong debut this year, 3DS sales dropped off rapidly, but analysts have speculated that the Vita's wide range of game titles will give it a longer-term appeal with consumers.

Mashable was able to try the Vita and several of its upcoming major games last week, and came away impressed with the device's capabilities. An intuitive touch interface, impressive graphics, augmented reality and wireless connectivity all made the Vita a definite upgrade over phone or tablet games, although not a must-buy for casual gamers. But those assets

will likely be overshadowed in consumers' minds if technical malfunctions persist.

The PlayStation Vita will be released in North America, Europe and Australia on Feb. 22. The WiFi-only model will sell for $249.99, with the 3G version priced at $299.99.

Sony Sued Over An Attempt To Keep Its Customers from Suing

But will those suing will be sued for suing?

It's irony at its finest: After mandating its users sign away their legal rights in order to access the PlayStation Network, Sony is on the receiving end of a lawsuit that claims the act was an unfair business practice. The class-action suit seeks to represent all those who purchased PlayStation 3 consoles prior to an August 2011 change to the PSN Terms of Service.

Shortly after the PlayStation Network was hacked - and then hacked again - Sony quietly added a "don't sue" clause to their Terms of Service, effectively handcuffing its users' legal rights. Acceptance was mandatory, lest your PlayStation 3 turn into an expensive paperweight. You could only opt out by sending a physical letter to Sony - if you noticed the clause buried in the legal document at all, of course.

If successful, the lawsuit could have wide-reaching effects: Both Microsoft and Electronic Arts added similar clauses to their Terms of Service after Sony did.

Video Games Won't Make You Smarter

Those action-packed video games under many Christmas trees on Sunday morning may be loads of fun, but don't expect them to improve kids' grades, concentration, driving skills or other cognitive abilities, one group of psychologists says.

Some researchers also say they've found video games such as current top-seller "Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 3" won't damage players' brains or cause them to do real violence.

Those relatively recent findings conflict with other studies on both the positive and negative potential of gaming, but one thing experts on all sides tend to agree about is that the debate - and their research - is far from over.

"Play these games because they are fun and you enjoy doing them, and let's kind of wait for more research to suggest whether or not they are actually good for us," said Florida State University psychologist Walter Boot.

Boot and two colleagues say they have turned up flaws in various studies ascribing cognitive benefits to playing video games and that they they've been unable to replicate the results. Boot, Florida State doctoral student Daniel Blakely and University of Illinois researcher Daniel Simons wrote about their findings in a paper published in the journal Frontiers in

Psychology three months ago.

It "happens to be a rather direct attack about our work," University of Rochester researcher Daphne Bavelier wrote in an email Thursday from France where she is on sabbatical.

Bavelier defended studies she and other scientists have conducted that show a causal link between video game playing and enhanced abilities.

She said it is Boot and his colleagues who have flaws in their work and wrote a point-by-point rebuttal of their paper’s detailed findings. It’s also the only negative position paper aligned against multiple, peer-reviewed studies by "world renowned experts," she wrote.

"This paper does not present new evidence, or even new analysis - it is just an opinionated discussion of existing data," Bavelier wrote. "Quite simply put, there is not much controversy about the published effects so far."

Christopher Ferguson, a clinical psychologist at Texas A&M International University in Laredo, Texas, has focused on the perceived dark side of video gaming. As opposed to prior studies indicating violent games could beget violent actions, Ferguson said he found "nothing."

Studies on violence and video games have some of the same flaws Boot found for research on cognitive benefits, Ferguson said. He said that was probably because researchers drew conclusions before all the data was in.

"Video games had this sort of new toy effect," Ferguson said by phone from Orlando, where he was visiting relatives for the holidays. "People didn’t know what to think about them and kind of got excited in both positive and negative ways."

This month’s edition of the journal Nature Reviews/Neuroscience includes an article on video game research, describing it as being still in its early days. The journal posed several questions to prominent researchers and published their responses.

They include Bavelier, an assistant professor in Rochester’s Department of Brain and Cognitive Science, and University of Minnesota psychologist C. Shawn Green, who submitted joint responses.

They maintained playing action video games "results in a wide range of behavioral benefits, including enhancements in low-level vision, visual attention, speed of processing and statistical inference."

Bavelier and Green also wrote there’s no black-and-white answer to the question of whether video games improve cognitive function because there are millions of games and hundreds of genres that can be played on various devices including computers, consoles and cell phones.

"Simply put, if one wants to know what the effects of video games are, the devil is in the details," they wrote.

Two more scientists questioned by the journal also cited studies showing positive results two others wrote that effects on the brain and behavior are "uncertain" and that studies have not generally showing gaming enhances higher level reasoning.

Boot, 32, and Ferguson, 40, grew up playing video games. Ferguson said he

still plays games such as Lego’s Star Wars and Indiana Jones with his 8-year-old son. He suggested other parents do likewise.

"When they hear about Grand Theft Auto or Medal of Honor they get all freaky about it," Ferguson said.

But, he said, a colleague’s research shows parents realize their fears were unjustified once they’ve played the games themselves.

Those trying to improve specific abilities such as driving a car or flying an airplane should look to simulators that focus on those skills instead of video games, Boot said.

"Simulate the demands that you’ll actually encounter in those tasks rather than giving someone Grand Theft Auto and assuming there’s going to be some kind of magical transfer of skills that you pick up in that game to actual driving performance," he said.

There’s also a proven alternative for boosting brain power that has other beneficial effects as well, Boot said. It’s called exercise.

"Don’t sit down and play a game," he said. "Go out there for a walk."

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A-ONE’s Headline News
The Latest in Computer Technology News
Compiled by: Dana P. Jacobson

SOPA Vote Delayed Indefinitely

In a victory for opponents of the Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA), the House Judiciary Committee decided today to delay a vote on the highly controversial bill until the "earliest practical day that Congress is in session." The decision could push the vote to next week, or as far as next year, after Congress returns from its holiday break. Either way, opponents now have more time to fight the legislation, which many say will usher in unprecedented censorship on the Internet and stifle innovation.

At the request of SOPA opponents on the Committee, Rep. Lamar Smith (R-TX), the chief sponsor of SOPA and the Committee s chairman, agreed to delay a vote on the bill until experts could be brought in to explain the technical ramifications of altering the domain-name system (DNS) as a way to fight online piracy.

As written, SOPA would require Internet service providers (ISPs) to block access to sites that have been accused by copyright holders of facilitating the spread of pirated material, at the behest of the Attorney General. DNS providers, servers, payment processors and advertisers would be required to stop doing business with accused sites. Search engines, like Google, would be ordered by the Justice Department to completely remove accused sites from their system.

Supporters of the SOPA argue that the bill only targets "foreign rogue sites," which cannot be sued under current US copyright law. Law-abiding sites in the United States, they say, are at no risk.

"The bill defines rogue sites as foreign websites primarily dedicated to the sale and distribution of illegal or infringing material or foreign websites that market themselves as websites primarily dedicated to illegal or infringing activity," said Rep. Smith in response to a letter from Google, Twitter, eBay and a number of Internet titans who oppose SOPA. "Lawful companies and websites like Google, Twitter, Yahoo and Facebook have nothing to worry about under this bill."

Rep. Smith s interpretation goes against a rapidly growing number of experts who say SOPA s detrimental effects will reach far and wide, and will absolutely affect a large number of websites in the United States, including sites and services like Tumblr, Twitter, Reddit, eBay and Google, to name only a few.

Yesterday, 83 high-profile investors and engineers - many of whom played key roles in the creation of the Internet - signed a letter that explains that the enactment of SOPA will not only "create an environment of tremendous fear and uncertainty for technological innovation, and seriously harm the credibility of the United States in its role as a steward of key Internet infrastructure," but will also fragment the DNS, making the entire Internet less secure. At the same time, it would "engender censorship that will simultaneously be circumvented by deliberate infringers while hampering innocent parties right and ability to communicate and express themselves online."

In other words: SOPA, they say, will make online censorship rampant, and make it more dangerous for technology companies to operate. It will jeopardize the integrity of the Internet, all the while doing nothing to stop online piracy, since these sites could still be accessed through their IP address.

During the two markup hearings, about 20 amendments to SOPA were proposed to address the concerns of opponents of the bill. None passed. When the Committee resumes its markup hearings on SOPA, it will have around 30 additional amendments to consider before the bill can go up for a full vote before the House.

GoDaddy Goes Back on Pro-SOPA Stance To Avoid Boycott

Remember when GoDaddy stood firm on its support for the Stop Online Privacy Act (SOPA)? That s all in the past now, as apparently the company has officially announced a position change on Friday.

In a statement, the domain registrar pointed out that though it had supported the controversial piece of legislation, GoDaddy along with its general counsel, Christine Jones, had fought to revise some of the uglier aspects of the bill: limitations on DNS filtering, harder consequences for weak claims and a way to protect freedom of speech. GoDaddy emphasized its support for the First Amendment and the importance of the internet for the economy. The company admits to removing any pro-SOPA blog posts to ensure there is no confusion as to what side GoDaddy stands on.

"Fighting online piracy is of the utmost importance, which is why Go Daddy has been working to help craft revisions to this legislation " but we can clearly do better," said the company s CEO, Warren Adelman. "It s very important that all Internet stakeholders work together on this. Getting it right is worth the wait. Go Daddy will support it when and if the Internet community supports it.

Though "Internet community" may refer to the large host of companies, services, and websites who have spoken out against SOPA such as Facebook, Google, Twitter, 4chan, Yahoo etc., it most likely refers to a recent campaign against Go Daddy which began in the Reddit community. Yesterday, Reddit user selfprodigy kickstarted the move your domain day boycott which quickly gathered traction and gained anti-GoDaddy support from StackOverflow, the 1,000 domain strong Cheezburger Network, Y Combinator and even Wikipedia. December 29 was the the date for the exodus, though since GoDadddy seems to have received the message the attack dogs will probably be called off. +1 for the Internet.

China Hackers Breached U.S. Chamber of Commerce

Hackers in China broke through the computer defenses of the U.S. Chamber of Commerce last year and were able to access information about its operations and its 3 million members, the Wall Street Journal reported on Wednesday.

In Beijing, China dismissed the report.

The Journal, citing unidentified people familiar with the matter, reported the operation against the top American business lobbying group involved at least 300 internet addresses and was discovered and shut down in May 2010.

The newspaper reported it was not known how much information was seen by the hackers, or who may have had access to the network for more than a year before being discovered.

The group behind the breach is suspected by the United States of having ties to the Chinese government, one of the sources told the newspaper. The FBI informed the Chamber of Commerce that servers in China were pilfering its information, the source said.

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Liu Weimin dismissed the report.

"There’s nothing to be said about the baseless whipping up of so-called hacking and it won’t come to anything," he told a daily news briefing in Beijing. "Chinese law bans hacking."

The Chamber of Commerce employs 450 people and represents business interests in Congress, including most of the largest U.S. corporations.

The newspaper reported that the emails revealed the names of companies and key people in contact with the Chamber, as well as trade-policy documents, meeting notes, trip reports and schedules.

"What was unusual about it was that this was clearly somebody very sophisticated, who knew exactly who we are and who targeted specific people and used sophisticated tools to try to gather intelligence," the group’s chief operating officer, David Chavern, told the Journal.

China is often cited as a suspect in various hacking attacks on U.S. targets. In August, the Pentagon warned in a report to Congress that hacking from China could one day be used for overt military means.

Facebook Rapped in Europe Over Privacy

Facebook has to better explain to users what happens to their personal data and give them more control, the data commissioner in Ireland, home to the website's international headquarters, said Wednesday.

Facebook must work towards "simpler explanations of its privacy policies (and) ... easier accessibility and prominence of these policies," the Irish Data Protection Commissioner (DPC) said.

It called on the US firm behind the popular website, which helps its some 800 million users worldwide keep in touch with friends and exchange information, to provide "an enhanced ability for users to make their own informed choices."

The DPC report, compiled after a three-month "audit" and available at www.dataprotection.ie/docs/Home/4.htm, also called on Facebook to allow users to delete permanently old messages, friend requests, pokes, tags and posts.

Facebook's indefinite retention of information of what adverts users had clicked on was also "unacceptable," it said. Facebook said in response it would "move immediately to a two-year retention period."

The watchdog also said that Facebooks implementation of its facial recognition feature, allowing users to identify or "tag" people in photos, should have been handled "in a more appropriate manner."

It also said it was "inappropriate" for Facebook to hold data collected from "social plug-ins" - the "like" button - other than "for a very short period and for very limited purposes."

It said Facebook should provide within 40 days all information it holds on a particular user or non-user if requested to do so.

The DPC conducted the audit, aimed at determining whether Facebook complied with Irish and by extension European Union law, because Facebook Ireland is the entity with which non-US and non-Canadian users have a contract, the DPC said.

It followed a string of complaints by an Austrian student called Max Schrems who rose to prominence with his "Europe-versus-Facebook" pressure group, as well as the Norwegian Consumer Council and other individuals.

Schrems, 24, had launched his campaign after being shocked to receive from Facebook, in response to a demand for all the data it held on him, 1,222 pages of information, he told AFP earlier this year.

"At first sight the report seems to be a first victory over Facebook's ignorance towards privacy laws," Europe-versus-Facebook said on its website www.europe-v-facebook.org/EN/en.html.

Co-founded by Mark Zuckerberg when he too was a student, Facebook said in response that the DPC had "highlighted several opportunities to strengthen our existing practices."

"Facebook has committed to either implement, or to consider, other ’best practice’ improvements recommended by the DPC, even in situations where our practices already comply with legal requirements," it said in a statement available at www.facebook.com/facebookpublicpolicyeurope.

Facebook has been under rising regulatory scrutiny as the Palo Alto, California-based firm has tried to turn the massively popular site into a profitable business ahead of a possible stock market listing.

On November 30 it agreed with the US Federal Trade Commission to tighten its privacy policies after the FTC found it had deceived users by for example making personal data that it had vowed to keep private available to advertisers.

DPC deputy commissioner Gary Davis said that because Facebook Ireland was only given responsibility for international users in September 2010, it "should not come as a surprise... that there should be room for improvement."

"Facebook is constantly evolving and adapting in response to user needs and technical developments," the DPC said.

"Indeed the almost Darwinian nature of the site means that there will constantly be an absolute need to have in place robust mechanisms to keep pace with the innovation that is the source of the site’s success."

The DPC said a formal review of progress would take place in July. In theory Facebook could be fined up to 100,000 euros ($130,520) if it refuses to comply with the body’s recommendations, but this is seen as highly unlikely.

’Mark Zuckerberg’ Hopes Facebook Won’t Sue its ’Founder’

Everyone loves being mistaken for a celebrity from time to time, right? Depending on who you may (or may not) resemble, it can be flattering to be thrown into the same bucket as Zach Galifianakis, or Emma Watson, or Tyra Banks, et cetera. And it’s even better when you know someone who shares the same name as a celebrity: Watching your buddy Thomas Cruise try to make dinner reservations never gets old.

It’s a little trickier if you’re that person, but you’re trying to make a legitimate social network profile to represent yourself instead of your celebrity doppelganger. And as one Israeli entrepreneur has learned, it can be downright disastrous when your name is that of a social network’s well-known founder.

To be fair, Roten Guez wasn’t born with the name he now uses: Mark Zuckerberg. And it’s not just a clever little edit on his Facebook profile that’s led to his account being disabled by Facebook HQ. Guez’s legal name, as of this article’s writing, is indeed Mark Zuckerberg.

Were one able to see Guez/Zuckerberg’s Facebook wall, you’d probably notice a big life event happening on December 7 - the official date of

Guez’s name change. The big story behind his reasoning for doing so is a bit of a cat-and-mouse game but, in short, Guez was hoping that Facebook would somehow find it difficult (or a strange PR move) to sue the name of the company’s founder. Facebook has had a considerably easier time threatening to sue Guez otherwise.

The animosity between the social network and its not-really-founder started around January of this year. Guez had filed a lawsuit against Facebook and sales affiliate Nana10 MASA claiming that the company had refused to restore his (original) Facebook account for no "apparent, legitimate reason" following an alleged hacking attack. The likely reasoning, we suspect, was related to Guez’s business: A company called "Like Store," which promised to boost the number of likes on a branded Facebook page for a fee ranging in the hundreds of dollars.

Facebook’s law firm, Perkins Cole, responded with a cease-and-desist letter in September that informed Guez he was prohibited from accessing Facebook at any point in the future (for business or personal interests). Guez changed his name in December and started using it to create a new Facebook profile. This "unofficial" Mark Zuckerberg profile was subsequently banned by Facebook, although Guez’s "I’m Mark Zuckerberg" Facebook page still exists as of this article’s writing.

Guez has since received a second letter from Perkins Cole demanding that he stop accessing Facebook, and it remains to be seen how each side will react to the other’s actions going forward. Or, as Guez asks on his webpage, will Facebook (now) sue Mark Zuckerberg?

Firefox Saved as Google Renews Default Search Engine Deal

The will they or won t they suspense has ended. Google has climbed back into bed with the Firefox web browser, renewing the agreement to stay as default search engine for Firefox.

The financial terms were undisclosed, but the Mozilla blog announced Tuesday that this "significant and mutually beneficial revenue agreement" has been extended for a at least another three years. Mozilla doesn t go into too much detail about what the three year agreement entails.

"Mozilla has been a valuable partner to Google over the years and we look forward to continuing this great partnership in the years to come," said Senior VP of Search at Google, Alan Eustace.

The contract was set to be renewed last month, but apparently the two companies have been in negotiations this entire time. The delay began to stir up a murmur about the fate of Firefox without Google as a partner. The search company s deal pays Mozilla for the privilege of being the default search engine. More than 98 percent of Mozilla s 2010 revenue came from royalties paid by search-engine companies, and by some estimates, Google made up around 85 percent of that. For 2010, Google was basically $100 million of Mozilla s entire $123 million income.

The rise in ranking for Google s Chrome browser may have helped fuel the worry surrounding Firefox. Chrome, according to StatCounter, recently passed Firefox up, becoming the second most popular browser globally with a 25.7 percent market share in November 2011. Though other metrics firms stated slightly different figures, it has begun to look as if Google

didn t need Firefox anymore.

However, there s no need to speculate anymore as to whether Firefox will limp along or if Microsoft will rush in to fill Google s gap; Firefox will continue to be propped up for the next few years. Hopefully, over the three year breather, we ll see some diversification with Firefox to make up for its vulnerabilites.

Skype Offering Free Airport WiFi to Mac, PC and iOS Users in December

Skype says it wants to make travelers lives easier over the holidays and has announced a free WiFi deal with certain airports. If you find yourself stuck in one of the 50+ participating airports terminals over the holidays, you ll be able to tap into a free hour of Internet access at a third party wireless hotspot, courtesy of the Microsoft-acquired voIP service.

The date for the free WiFi offer begins Wednesday, December 21 and ends December 27. Skype video and voice calls will be free and available to those with either a PC, Mac or iOS devices. It doesn t seem as if those with Android, Blackberry or Windows Phone devices will get to access the offer.

To participate in the WiFi bounty, you ll need to have the latest version of Skype for Windows or Mac, or have downloaded the Skype WiFi app for the iPad or iPhone. Sign in to your account and verify that the location is correct; if it s not, Skype WiFi charges by the minute. Only one hour is free, but that may be the pleasant distraction needed during this stressful season. Major airports like JFK and the San Francisco International Airport are on the list; check with Skype to see if your airport is participating.

Skype s holiday message? Love and family: "The holidays are all about connecting with those you love. Skype is helping people maintain these meaningful connections this holiday season from wherever they may be," said Skype product marketing director, Linda Summers.

The company is picking up the Google slack this season. Google has in the past provided free wireless to many weary travelers stuck in airports around this time, though it seems as if Santa s taking a break this year. Aside from the free offer, the Skype Credit powered WiFi program allows users Internet access at over 1 million WiFi hotspots globally.

Why Defensive .XXX Registration Is Only the Beginning of a Branding Nightmare

If you did not know about ICANN s decision to release the .xxx gTLD (global Top Level Domain) earlier in the year you probably do now. You may have been surprised to receive a barrage of emails from various registrars like GoDaddy and Register.com hawking domains in the Internet s new red light district (unless you are already in the adult entertainment business). The comprehensive email and marketing campaigns that the registrars have unleashed to publicize the .xxx registry can only lead one to assume that existing adult entertainment industry has been clamoring for this new slice of the web, or that ordinary folks are quitting their jobs and starting new careers as adult web site entrepreneurs. However, as Mashable has

previously pointed out, neither seems to be the case.

That article explains the .xxx gTLD has led to a virtual stampede by legitimate businesses and institutions to defensively register their names in the .xxx domain in order to protect those names from falling into the wrong hands and being used with adult content. The Salt Lake Tribune reported earlier in the week that Brigham Young University has purchased several domains in the .xxx registry. Some believe this unintended (though eminently foreseeable) consequence of the .xxx registry has made it an epic failure.

I agree, and yet there s more for brand managers at companies of all sizes to think about. Some of the commercial success of the .xxx gTLD is attributable to defensive registrations - a unique form of Internet extortion whereby legitimate institutions are forced to pay for .xxx domains even though they have no intention of ever using them. According to the .xxx registry, there have already been over 160,000 .xxx domain registrations as of December 12th. Back-of-the-envelope calculations indicate that at about $100 a domain (based on public one year pricing at GoDaddy) that s a windfall of roughly $16 million for registrars, with about $29,000 going to ICAAN. Thus, in a perverse twist, the .xxx registry s commercial success is being funded in part by the non-adult entertainment world because the .xxx gTLD has the unique potential to damage a brand.

The .xxx gTLD is just the tip of the iceberg as the Internet readies itself for the launch of ICANN s new gTLD program on January 12, 2012. Brand owners will have to be ready, just as with the .xxx launch, to make sure they can grab those assets they deem most valuable when there are suddenly hundreds of new gTLDs foisted on the marketplace. It will also be important for corporate counsel and IP attorneys to brush up on the UDRP process, by which companies can file complaints when parties register domains which are identical to or include their company trademarks and variations. What can be done now to prepare for this?

- Identify valuable marks in your company s trademark portfolio that you will want to protect and that are worthy of obtaining defensive registrations.
- Designate someone in your organization or an outside attorney/consultant to follow the latest extension applications with ICANN so you can stay in front of the curve and identify those extensions that may be relevant to your business before your corporate names/assets are lost to third parties or squatters.
- Create a budget that will be dedicated to obtaining these assets, and figure out who will be responsible for registering names on your behalf.
- Begin thinking comprehensively about your company’s Internet strategy and make sure that going forward, future product/trademark development is done with an eye toward co-existing in an expanded Internet.

Microsoft Says 2012 CES Tech Show Will Be Its Last

Microsoft Corp. is pulling out of the International Consumer Electronics Show, the largest trade show in the Americas. It’s joining Apple in saying that it prefers to put on its own events when the time is right to show off its products.

Microsoft said the next show, to be held Jan. 9-12 in Las Vegas, will be

the last show at which it has a booth or the CEO delivers the customary kick-off speech.

Company founder Bill Gates delivered keynote speeches at the show for 11 straight years. Current CEO Steve Ballmer has delivered the speech for the past three shows and will present his last next month.

The software company has been one of the biggest U.S. supporters of the annual event, which gathered nearly 150,000 people this year. Originally focused on living-room electronics, the show has become the big annual U.S. event for all consumer technology after the demise of big computer-focused shows such as Comdex.

Microsoft says it will continue to use CES as a place to connect to customers, but it won't have a booth because its product milestones don't align with the show's January timing.

At the upcoming show, Ballmer is scheduled to speak about the Windows 8 operating system. But the software isn't expected to be ready until late next year, so computer makers won't have any real Windows 8 products at the show.

"They're not cooked yet. So he's going to be stuck trying to present a bunch of stuff that will be months away from being ready," said technology industry analyst Rob Enderle.

Apple doesn't participate in trade shows at all after pulling out of the Macworld Conference & Expo after 2009.

The Consumer Electronics Association, which organizes CES, said it has tremendous demand for invitations to hold keynote speeches, and it has already received feelers from companies that want to rent for the 2013 show the space where Microsoft usually has its booth.

Nevada Adopts Rules for Internet Poker Licenses

Nevada gambling regulators on Thursday unanimously approved rules that allow companies in the state apply for licenses to operate poker websites, a move that puts Nevada in a position to capitalize if Congress reverses its ban on Internet gambling.

The Las Vegas Review-Journal reports that the regulations would let casino companies operate Internet poker sites in the state, and some sites could begin operating by the end of 2012.

"We estimate the U.S. online poker market at $5 billion in revenue, relative to the current $24 billion global Internet gaming market and (the) $33 billion commercial casino market in the U.S.," Union Gaming Group analyst Bill Lerner wrote in a research report. "In our opinion, the commercialization of online poker is a 2013 event."

Online poker in Nevada could be commercially marginal, but would provide a model for other states, Lerner said.

The guidelines were mandated by the state Legislature's approval of Assembly Bill 258 earlier this year, which dictated that Internet poker regulations be established by Jan. 31.

Licensed gaming companies seeking online poker licenses will have to prove that their technology will be able to limit play to state residents of a legal age. Online poker sites are also required to establish procedures to detect money laundering, fraud or other criminal activities, and to establish a cash reserve to complement money deposited by customers in their accounts.

Caesars Entertainment Corp. and Boyd Gaming Corp. have already submitted proposals to be licensed once regulations are ready, along with casino equipment manufacturers such as International Game Technology, Bally Technologies Inc. and Cantor Gaming.

According to the regulations, companies new to Nevada would be vetted with full licensing investigations, which usually take several months.

Casino industry representatives applauded the vote despite online poker being illegal in the United States.

The federal Unlawful Internet Gambling Enforcement Act of 2006 prohibits companies from accepting payments related to online wagering, but allows several exceptions, including intrastate wagering and fantasy sports.

Social Networking Is The Most Popular Online Activity

1.2 billion users worldwide - 82 percent of the world s internet population over the age of 15 - now log on to a social networking site.

Internet users around the world spent close to one in every five minutes on social networking sites in October, says new research by research firm comScore, making it the most engaging online activity worldwide.

It s only taken a few years for social networking to gain the attention (and time) of internet users worldwide. In 2007 Internet users spent only six percent of their time on social networking sites.

"The emergence and widespread global adoption of social networks has vastly influenced human interaction on an individual, community and larger societal level, and underscores the convergence of the online and offline worlds," notes Linda Boland Abraham, comScore CMO and EVP of global development in the December 21 report. "Regardless of geography, social networks are weaving themselves ever more intricately into the fabric of the digital experience, opening a world of new opportunity for business and technology."

Facebook, the third largest web property online, is king of all social networking sites. Visits to Facebook accounted for one in every seven minutes internet users spent online in October and 75 percent of all time spent on all social networking sites.

Twitter is the top dog when it comes to microblogging but China s Sina Weibo is growing quickly too. Sina Weibo grew 181 percent over the last year and was the tenth largest social network in October; Twitter grew 59 percent during the same period.

In a December 22 post on its blog, data intelligence firm Experian Hitwise revealed that digital pinboard site Pinterest has grown to become one of

the top 10 social networking sites. It s interesting news as the social network is still in its infancy and is currently invite-only.

"The invitation only site received nearly 11 million total visits during the week ending December 17, 2011, almost 40 times the number of total visits versus just six months ago (week ending June 18, 2011)," said Experian Hitwise.

Social networking is not just limited to the web. Close to 65 percent of all smartphone users in the US visited a social networking site in October; two in five used their mobile device to connect to a social network nearly every day.

Internet users in Israel were the most engaged social networkers in the world, racking up an average of 11.1 hours per visitor on networking sites in October - close to double the worldwide average of 5.7 hours per visitor.

Latin American countries accounted for five out of the top ten most engaged social networking countries while the United States, surprisingly, didn t even make it into the top ten.

Top ten most engaged countries for social networking in October 2011, with average number of hours per visitor:

Israel - 11.1 hours
Argentina - 10.7 hours
Russia - 10.4 hours
Turkey - 10.2 hours
Chile - 9.8 hours
The Philippines - 8.7 hours
Colombia - 8.5 hours
Peru - 8.3 hours
Venezuela - 7.9 hours
Canada - 7.7 hours

This Is Why You Were Friended or Unfriended

While some Internet interactions are online-only relationships, the most common reason we add friends on Facebook is because we know people in real life.

According to recent research from NM Incite, for 82% of Facebook users, knowing someone offline is reason to add them on the social network. The next most common reason for adding a friend is having many mutual friends, a practice reported by 60% of users.

The remaining reasons for adding friends include superficial aspects of your Facebook profile such as physical attractiveness and friend count - which is not surprising considering many users make their posts and comments visible to only their Friends. You can see the complete results of the study in the graphic below.

When it comes to why we unfriend, there are more possible explanations. Fifty-five percent of Facebook users call offensive comments cause for removing someone from their networks. The next most common reason is not knowing a friend well (41%) and sales soliciting (39%). The remaining

explanations are a variety of social media etiquette SNAFUs.

Men are more likely to use Facebook for professional networking and dating. For women, Facebook is the place to connect with real life friends, snag deals and express creativity. Women are more likely to remove friends for offensive comments or a weak offline relationship.

The "State of Social Media Survey" polled 1,895 social media using adults (age 18 and older), recruited online between Mar. 31 and Apr. 14 through online forums, blogs and other social networking platforms.

Why do you friend and unfriend people on Facebook? Let us know your practices in the comments.

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